

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT M 00411 230349Z  
ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10  
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3144  
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA  
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT MORESBY 0411

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PP  
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION LEADERSHIP CHANGES

REF: PORT MORESBY 390

1. SUMMARY: IN A MOVE SURPRISING ONLY IN ITS RAPIDITY, OPPOSITION PARLIAMENTARIANS ELECTED IAMBAKEY OKUK TO SUCCEED SIR TEI ABAL AS THEIR LEADER. WITH PARLIAMENT CLOSING MARCH 22, THE SPEAKER DID NOT RECOGNIZE THE CHANGE FORMALLY BUT SIR TEI WILL BE EASED OUT AND OKUK WILL BE RECOGNIZED OPPOSITION LEADER IN THE MAY SESSION. ALTHOUGH THE SITUATION IN THE OPPOSITION STILL FLUID, IT CLEAR THAT THE UNITED PARTY HAS SUFFERED SHARP, PERHAPS FATAL, BLOW AND THAT SOMARE GOVERNMENT WILL FACE A MUCH MORE DETERMINED OPPOSITION IN FUTURE. HOW CONSTRUCTIVE A LEADER OKUK WILL BE IS OPEN TO QUESTION. END SUMMARY.

2. FEBRUARY-MARCH SESSION OF PARLIAMENT ENDED MORNING MARCH 22 WITH DE FACTO CHANGE IN OPPOSITION LEADERSHIP HAVING TAKEN PLACE. IN CONFUSING, CONTENTIOUS  
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PAGE 02 PORT M 00411 230349Z

SESSION ON MARCH 20, OPPOSITION MEMBERS DIVIDED AS FOLLOWS:  
16 SUPPORTING SHADOW MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT, IAMBAKEY OKUK; 9 SUPPORTING OPPOSITION LEADER SIR TEI ABAL AND 5 UNDECIDED. ALTHOUGH THE OPPOSITION HAS ACKNOWLEDGED OKUK'S LEADERSHIP, IT HAS NOT BEEN FORMALLY RECOGNIZED BY THE SPEAKER.

3. TWO SHADOW MINISTERS TOLD EMBOFF MARCH 21 THAT GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED NOT TO PUSH SIR TEI OUT UNCEREMONIOUSLY AND OPPOSITION NOT FIGHTING THIS. OVER COMING WEEKS, TRANSFER OF STAFF AND PREROGATIVES FROM ABAL TO OKUK WILL TAKE PLACE AND OKUK WILL BE RECOGNIZED FORMALLY WHEN PARLIAMENT NEXT SITS MAY 22. PRESS AND OTHER POLITICAL SOURCES HAVE SINCE CONFIRMED THIS.

4. SIR TEI'S FALL HAS LONG BEEN ANTICIPATED. ALTHOUGH PRESSURES FOR HIS REMOVAL GREW AS RESULT OF HIS ACCIDENTAL KILLING OF A MOTORCYCLIST IN AN AUTO MISHAP (REFTTEL), DISCONTENT STEMMED FROM HIS RELATIVE INEFFECTIVENESS AND FROM A FEELING THAT "LOYAL OPPOSITION" TO HIM MEANT LOYAL FIRST AND OPPOSITION SECOND. NEVERTHELESS, RESPECT FOR SIR TEI, THE MAN, IS HIGH AND THERE IS TALK OF SOME SINECURE OR OTHER RECOGNITION FOR HIM.

5. OKUK'S NEW GROUP IS CALLING ITSELF THE PEOPLE'S UNITED FRONT BUT MEMBERS THEMSELVES HAVE NOT YET HAD TIME TO THINK OUT THEIR FUTURE PLANS OR THE ROLE THE UNITED PARTY (UP) IS TO PLAY, IF ANY. INTERESTINGLY, SEVERAL PAPUA BESENA BACKBENCHERS SUPPORTED OKUK, AS HAS FORMER GOVERNOR GENERAL SIR JOHN GUISE, WHO IS SCHEDULED TO BECOME DEPUTY OPPOSITION LEADER UNDER OKUK. AT THIS POINT, IT APPEARS THAT THE UNITED PARTY MAY IN ITS DEATH THROES. UP HAS BEEN BASICALLY A CONSERVATIVE HIGHLANDS PARTY WHICH CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 PORT M 00411 230349Z

WAS SLOW ON INDEPENDENCE. IN 1977 ELECTIONS, IT LOST SUBSTANTIAL GROUND TO PANGU AND THE PEOPLES PROGRESS PARTY. NOW IT HAS LOST CONTROL OF THE OPPOSITION TO OKUK, A CHIMBU WITH A HIGHLANDS BASE, AND GUISE WHO HAS STRENGTH AMONG THE PAPUANS. THE NATURE OF THE POLITICAL PARTY STRUCTURE IN PNG COULD WELL BE UNDERGOING A BASIC TRANSFORMATION.

6. ONE THING SEEMS CERTAIN. THERE WILL BE A CHANGE IN THE STYLE OF THE OPPOSITION. AS OKUK TOLD PARLIAMENT MARCH 21, HIS GROUP WOULD BECOME PNG'S FIRST "COMMITTED OPPOSITION", ONE OFFERING A TRUE ALTERNATIVE GOVERNMENT WITH AMBITION TO GOVERN. UNLIKE SIR TEI, OKUK IS AN ACERBIC LEADER. ALSO UNLIKE SIR TEI, HE WILL HAVE IN SIR JOHN GUISE, A DEPUTY WHO IS AN ARTICULATE, SKILLED POLITICIAN AND PARLIAMENTARIAN. WHAT IS NOT CERTAIN, HOWEVER, IS WHETHER THE OKUK GROUP IS PREPARED TO PLAY A CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE OR WHETHER IT WILL BE A CONTENTIOUS DESTRUCTIVE OPPOSITION INSPIRED BY OKUK'S STRONG PERSONAL ANIMOSITY TOWARDS THE PM. THE SITUATION OF THE NEW OPPOSITION ORGANIZATION IS STILL FLUID. IT IS COMING INTO BEING BUT ITS NATURE IS NOT YET DETERMINED.

7. DESPITE THE PROBABILITY THAT IT WILL FACE A MUCH MORE

FORCEFUL AND DETERMINED OPPOSITION, THE GOVERNMENT GAINED SOMETHING DURING THE WEEK ALSO. UNITED PARTY SHADOW MINISTER FOR DEFENCE WESANI IWOKSIM AND AN INDEPENDENT MP DEFECTED TO PANGU, INCREASING PANGU'S PARLIAMENTARY STRENGTH FROM 49 TO 51 MEMBERS AND THE GOVERNMENT'S MAJORITY TO 71.

8. SEPTTEL FOLLOWS ON OKUK.  
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## Message Attributes

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**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
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**Decaption Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
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